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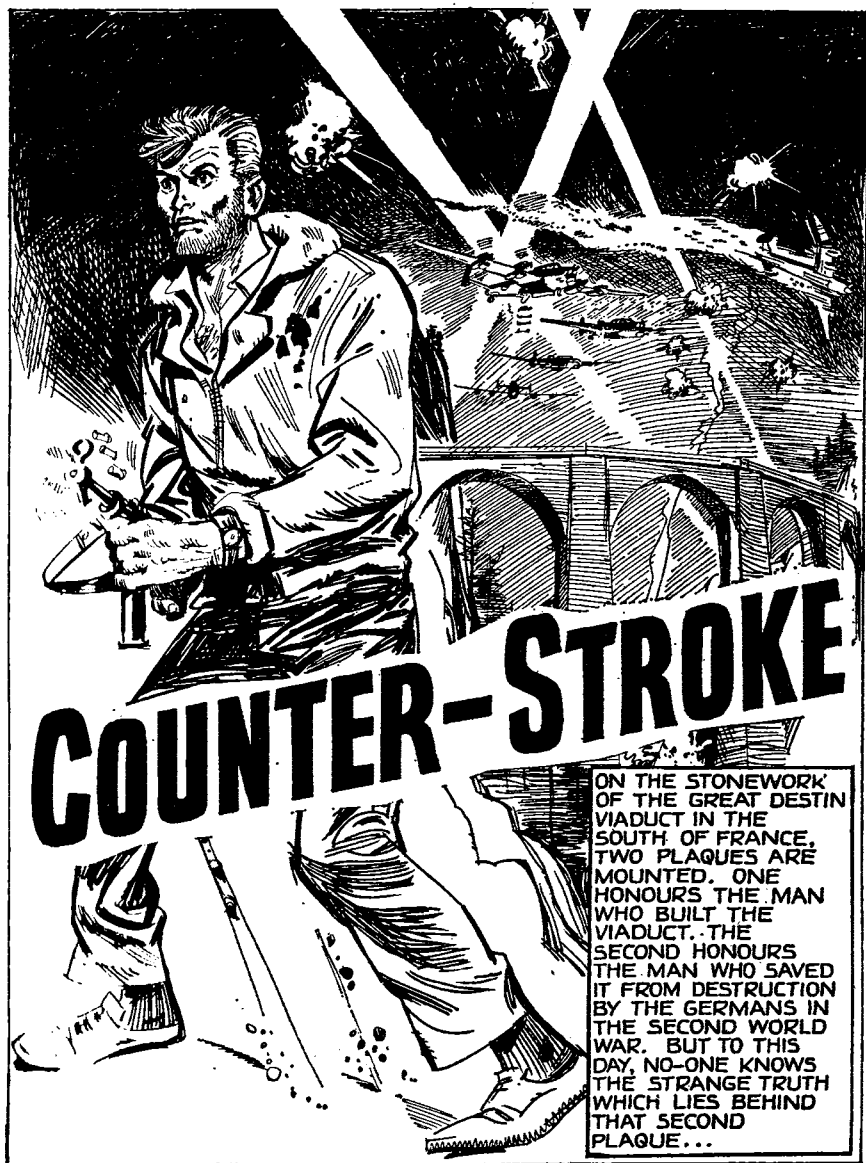
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COUNTER- STROKE

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ON THE STONWORK OF THE GREAT DESTIN VIADUCT IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE, TWO PLAQUES ARE MOUNTED. ONE HONOURS THE MAN WHO BUILT THE VIADUCT. THE SECOND HONOURS THE MAN WHO SAVED IT FROM DESTRUCTION BY THE GERMANS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR. BUT TO THIS DAY, NO-ONE KNOWS THE STRANGE TRUTH WHICH LIES BEHIND THAT SECOND PLAQUE...

Chapter 1. *BOMBER STRIKE*



THE YOUNG MAN'S NAME WAS HUGO RENNIE. FROM MIDNIGHT ONWARDS, HIS COMPANION TRIED TO PERSUADE HIM TO LEAVE...



BUT RENNIE WAS HEADSTRONG AND STUBBORN. ONLY WHEN HIS POCKETS WERE EMPTY DID HE GET UP FROM THE ROULETTE TABLE...

CURSE IT!
THAT'S MY LAST FRANC GONE!
I'M FLAT!

ABOUT TIME, TOO!
DO YOU KNOW IT'S
FOUR IN THE
MORNING?

THE TWO YOUNG MEN WALKED OUT TO RENNIE'S FAST SPORTS CAR, PARKED OUTSIDE THE CASINO...

WE'D BETTER GET CRACKING IF WE'RE GOING TO CATCH THE BOAT TRAIN IN PARIS TOMORROW!

WE'LL NEVER MAKE IT NOW, HUGO... WE MIGHT AS WELL GET SOME SLEEP AND DRIVE UP COMFORTABLY IN THE MORNING!

RENNIE SLAMMED THE CAR INTO GEAR RECKLESSLY...

WHO WANTS TO BE COMFORTABLE? LIVE DANGEROUSLY, THAT'S MY MOTTO! HOLD ON, PAT, PARIS, NEXT STOP!

BUT LOOK HERE, HUGO, YOU'RE IN NO CONDITION TO DRIVE. YOU'RE HALF ASLEEP ALREADY.

Counter-Stroke

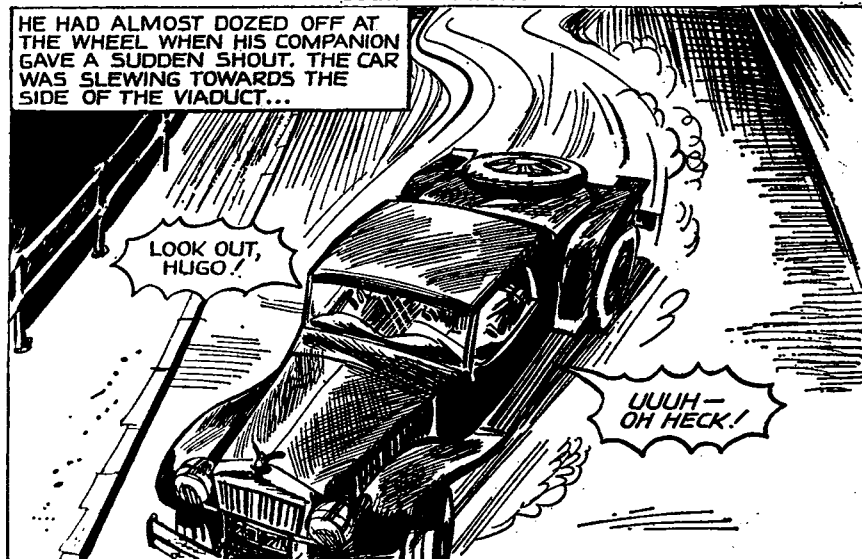
THE CAR ROARED NORTH OUT OF ST. TROPEZ INTO THE FOOTHILLS OF THE MARITIME ALPS, HEADING TOWARDS THE DESTIN VIADUCT...



RENNIE WAS A SKILFUL DRIVER, BUT HE HAD SPENT HALF THE NIGHT AT THE ROULETTE TABLE AND HE WAS DEAD TIRED. THE PATTERN OF LIGHT AND SHADOW LULLED HIM...



HE HAD ALMOST DOZED OFF AT THE WHEEL WHEN HIS COMPANION GAVE A SUDDEN SHOUT. THE CAR WAS SLEWING TOWARDS THE SIDE OF THE VIADUCT...



THE CAR WAS GOING TOO FAST AND RENNIE WAS TOO SHOCKED TO CONTROL IT. HE FLUNG OPEN THE OFFSIDE DOOR...



Counter-Stroke

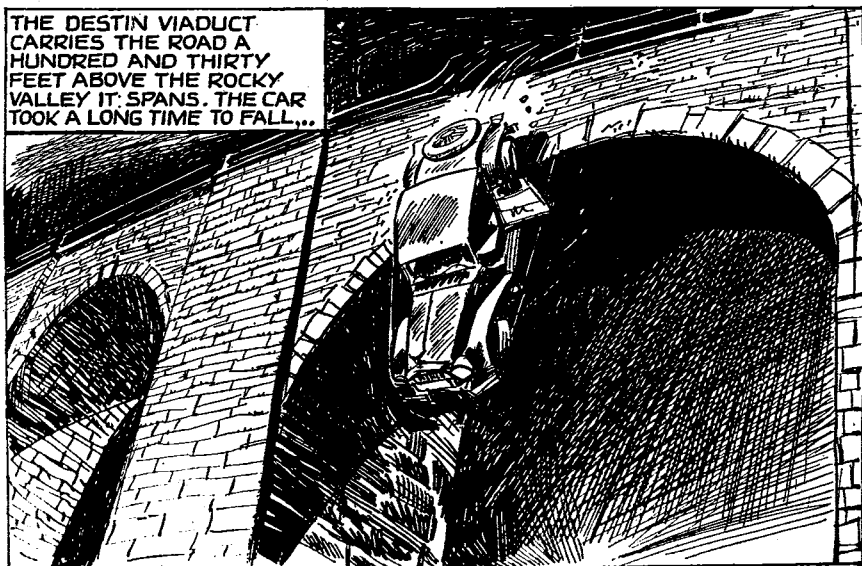
THE OTHER YOUNG MAN WAS STILL WRENCHING FRANTICALLY AT THE JAMMED DOOR WHEN THE CAR SMASHED THROUGH THE GUARD RAIL...

HE'S TRAPPED—
HE'S STILL IN THERE—
OH NO!

AAAAGH!



THE DESTIN VIADUCT
CARRIES THE ROAD A
HUNDRED AND THIRTY
FEET ABOVE THE ROCKY
VALLEY IT SPANS. THE CAR
TOOK A LONG TIME TO FALL...



HUGO RENNIE DRAGGED HIMSELF TO THE SHATTERED RAIL IN TIME TO SEE HIS CAR EXPLODE AS IT SMASHED INTO THE ROCKS BELOW...

HE DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE—BUT IT WASN'T MY FAULT!



THREE DAYS LATER, THE DEAD YOUNGSTER WAS BURIED IN ST. TROPEZ...

SO YOU'RE HUGO RENNIE, ARE YOU? I'M PAT'S BROTHER! THIS IS A BAD BUSINESS.



...THE POLICE FOUND THERE WAS AN OIL LEAK ON THE VIADUCT ROADWAY. THAT'S WHY THE CAR TIPPLED OVER.

THE ACCIDENT HAD SHAKEN RENNIE, BUT HE HAD MANAGED TO QUIETEN HIS OWN UNEASY CONSCIENCE...

THE FACT THAT YOU'D BEEN UP HALF THE NIGHT GAMBLING HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT, I SUPPOSE?

WHAT ARE YOU GETTING AT? IT WAS THE VIADUCT THAT KILLED PAT, NOT ME!



Counter-Stroke

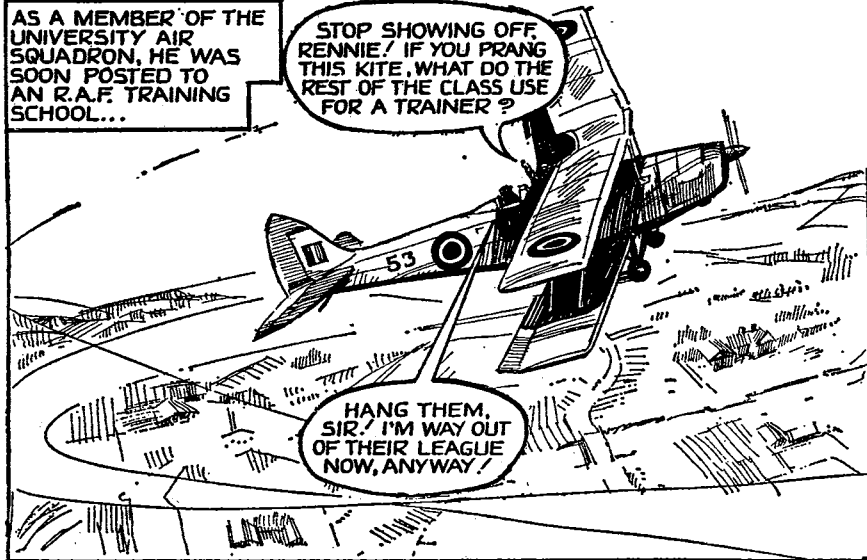
ON SEPTEMBER 1ST, RENNIE REACHED PARIS ON HIS WAY BACK TO ENGLAND. THE OMINOUS NEWS TOOK HIS MIND OFF THE TRAGEDY ON THE VIADUCT...



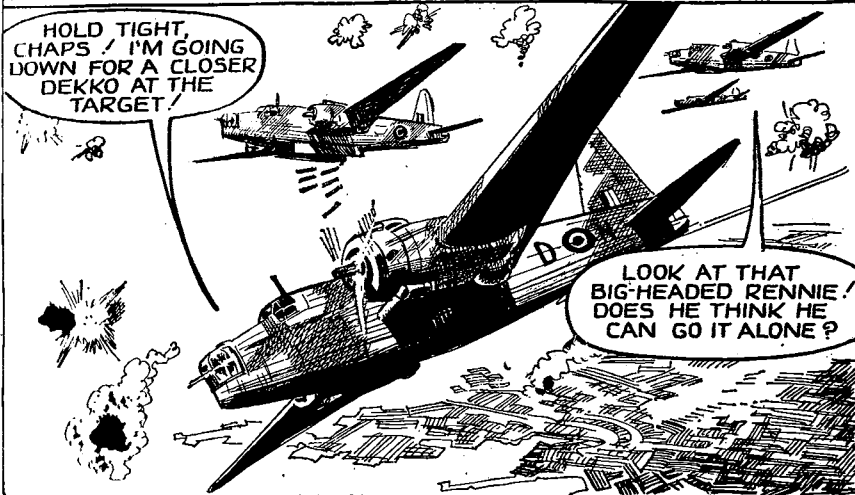
AS A MEMBER OF THE UNIVERSITY AIR SQUADRON, HE WAS SOON POSTED TO AN R.A.F. TRAINING SCHOOL...

STOP SHOWING OFF, RENNIE! IF YOU PRANG THIS KITE, WHAT DO THE REST OF THE CLASS USE FOR A TRAINER?

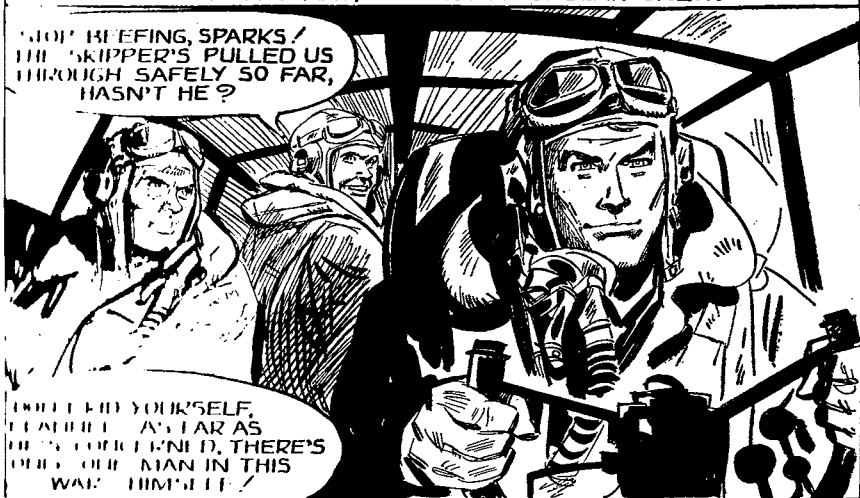
HANG THEM, SIR! I'M WAY OUT OF THEIR LEAGUE NOW, ANYWAY!



A YEAR LATER, RENNIE WAS A FLYING OFFICER IN A WELLINGTON SQUADRON OPERATING AGAINST THE GERMAN NORTH SEA PORTS. HE WAS STILL AS SKILFUL AND OVER-CONFIDENT AS EVER.



RENNIE'S BLATANT SELFISHNESS HINDERED HIS PROMOTION. AFTER THREE YEARS OF BOMBING MISSIONS OVER EUROPE, HE WAS STILL ONLY A FLIGHT-LIEUTENANT, AND NOT A POPULAR ONE...



ONE DAY IN JUNE 1944, THE SQUADRON, NOW FLYING LANCASTERS, WAS CALLED TO A SPECIAL BRIEFING...

OUR TARGET FOR TONIGHT IS A VITAL ONE, CHAPS! AN ALLIED INVASION FORCE WILL LAND IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE SOON TO SUPPORT THE NORMANDY LANDINGS. OUR JOB IS TO STOP JERRY GETTING REINFORCEMENTS THROUGH WHEN THE BALLOON GOES UP.



HUGO RENNIE STARED AT THE PHOTOGRAPH IN THE WING-COMMANDER'S HAND. HE LET OUT A STARTLED GASP...

TO DO THAT EFFECTIVELY, WE SHALL STRIKE TONIGHT AT THIS VITAL ROAD LINK BETWEEN ST. TROPEZ AND THE NORTH.



THE DESTIN VIADUCT!

THE WING-COMMANDER FROWNED...

YES, RENNIE, THE DESTIN VIADUCT! DOES THAT HAVE SOME SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE FOR YOU?



MAYBE, SIR / MY OATH, I'LL BE ONLY TOO PLEASED TO PLANT A STICK OF BOMBS ON IT!

RENNIE WAS BUSY WITH HIS OWN THOUGHTS AS THE TRUCK TOOK THE AIRCREWS OUT TO DISPERSAL THAT NIGHT...

THE SQUADRON WILL STRIKE FROM THE SOUTH-TAKING JERRY BY SURPRISE. ARE YOU LISTENING, RENNIE?

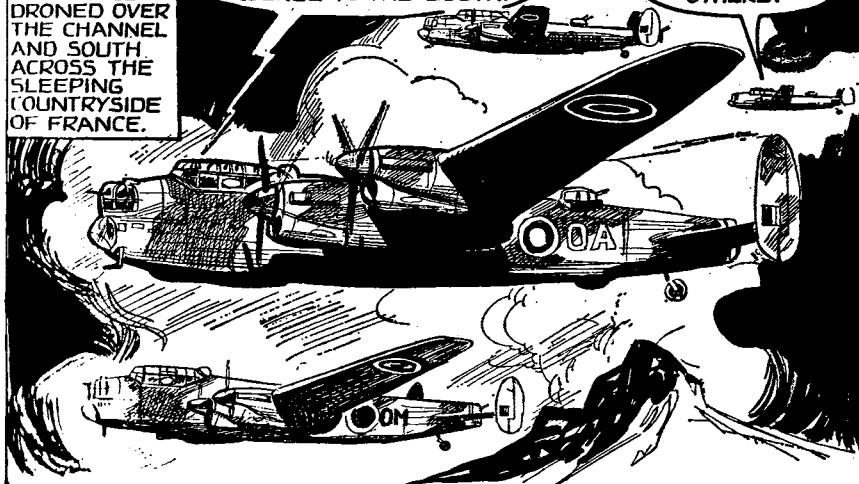
YES, SIR - I'M LISTENING!



LABOURING WITH A FULL BOMB LOAD, THE LANCS DRONED OVER THE CHANNEL AND SOUTH ACROSS THE SLEEPING COUNTRYSIDE OF FRANCE.

LEADER TO ALL AIRCRAFT-TARGET IS TWENTY MILES AHEAD. TIME TO CHANGE COURSE TO THE SOUTH.

HEY, SKIPPER, WE'RE DROPPING BEHIND THE OTHERS!



RENNIE SUDDENLY WRENCHED HIS LANC OUT OF THE FORMATION AND SLAMMED ON HARD PORT RUDDER...

I KNOW WE ARE, FLANNEL—AND NOW WE'RE SHAPING OUR OWN COURSE TO THE TARGET—DOWN THE VALLEY FROM THE NORTH!

BUT, SKIPPER, THE WHOLE SQUADRON'S SUPPOSED TO ATTACK FROM THE SOUTH. YOU KNOW WHAT OUR ORDERS ARE!

TO BLAZES WITH OUR ORDERS / I'VE GOT A SCORE TO SETTLE WITH THE DESTIN VIADUCT / IT KILLED A PAL OF MINE ONCE—AND I'M GOING TO BE THE ONE TO HAVE FIRST CRACK AT IT!

BUT THE VALLEY TO THE NORTH OF THE VIADUCT WAS NARROW AND THE THUNDER OF THE LANC'S FOUR ENGINES REVERBERATED OFF THE ROCK WALLS, ALERTING THE GERMAN GUNNERS...

ACHTUNG! SINGLE AIRCRAFT APPROACHING FROM NORTH / STAND TO!

GUN CREWS, CLOSE UP!

THE GERMAN GUNS OPENED UP WITH A SHATTERING CONCENTRATION OF FIRE AT THEIR LONE TARGET...

THIS IS CRAZY, SKIPPER! THE VALLEY'S TOO NARROW FOR US TO TAKE EVASIVE ACTION.

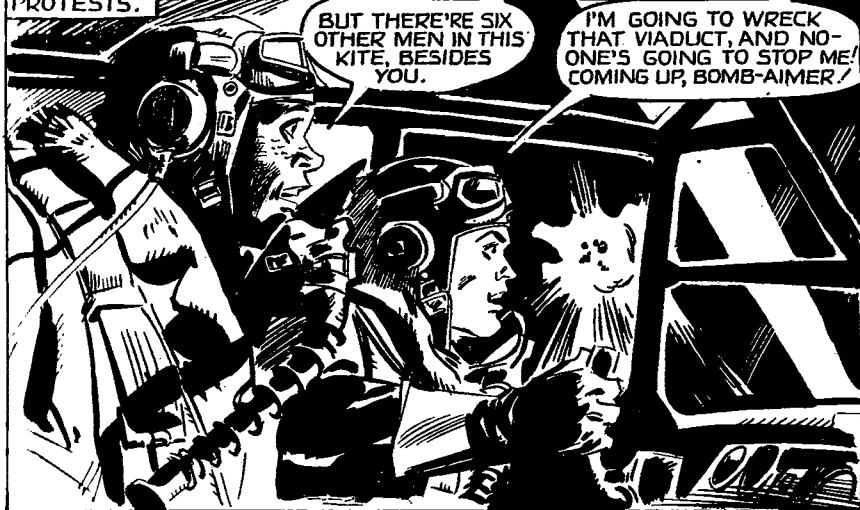
YEAH, WE'RE A SITTING DUCK!

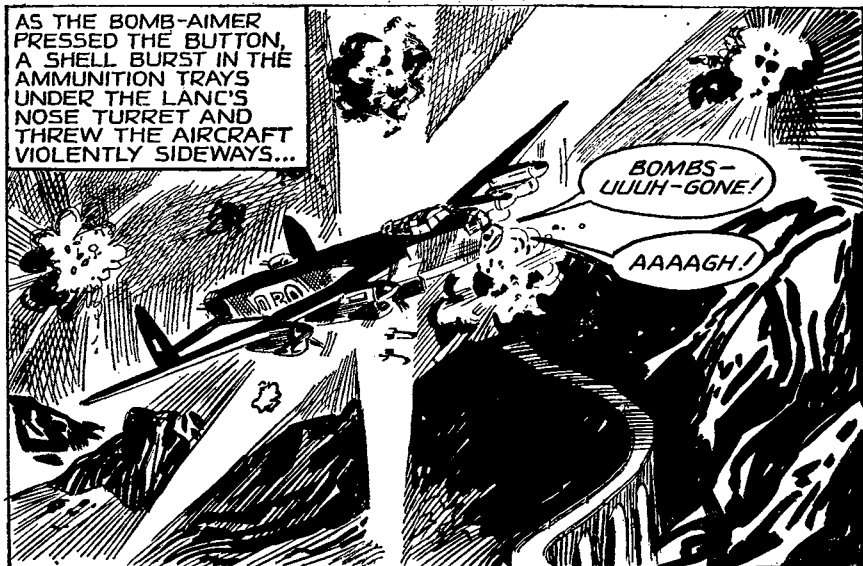
STOP WHINING, THE LOT OF YOU! I'M HANDLING THIS!

RENNIE'S SELFISHNESS HAD GOT HIS CREW INTO A SUICIDAL POSITION—BUT HE HELD THE LANC ON COURSE—DESPITE THEIR PROTESTS.

BUT THERE'RE SIX OTHER MEN IN THIS KITE, BESIDES YOU.

I'M GOING TO WRECK THAT VIADUCT, AND NO-ONE'S GOING TO STOP ME! COMING UP, BOMB-AIMER!





THE BOMBS FELL WIDE, BLASTING
HARMLESSLY INTO THE ROCK
FLOOR OF THE VALLEY A HUNDRED
YARDS FROM THE VIADUCT.



THE REST OF THE SQUADRON'S
PILOTS SAW THE LONE
LANCASTER FLOGGING OUT OF
THE VALLEY AS THEY STARTED
THEIR OWN BOMBING RUN...



ONCE OVER THE VIADUCT, THE SQUADRON WAS HAMMERED UNMERCIFULLY AS IT STORMED INTO THE ATTACK. ACCURATE BOMBING WAS IMPOSSIBLE...

LEFT...LEFT...
STEADY...

BOMBS
GONE!

PHEW,
THIS IS
MURDER!

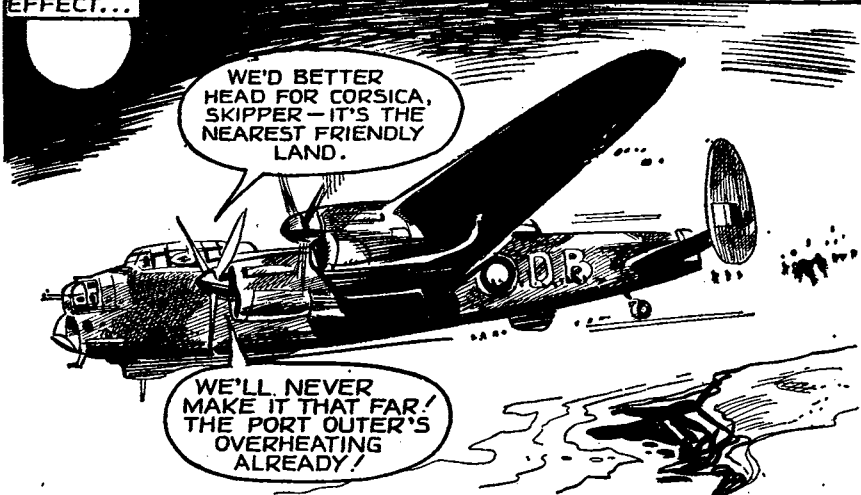
FIVE OF THE
LANCASTERS WERE
SMOLDERING HEAPS
OF WRECKAGE ON
THE FLOOR OF THE
VALLEY WHEN THE
LAST BOMBS HAD
USELESSLY
DROPPED...

THANKS TO RENNIE,
THERE WAS TOO MUCH FLAK
FOR A STEADY RUN-IN...

...AND THE
VIADUCT'S STILL
STANDING!

Counter-Stroke

MEANWHILE, O-OBOE WAS LIMPING ON TWO ENGINES TOWARDS THE SEA. THE EXPLODING AMMUNITION FROM THE NOSE TURRET HAD PLOUGHED THROUGH THE AIRCRAFT'S FUSELAGE WITH DEADLY EFFECT...



HUGO RENNIE SEEMED AT LAST TO BE CONCERNED FOR THE SAFETY OF HIS CREW...



BUT RENNIE'S CREW HAD FLOWN WITH HIM FOR TOO LONG. THEIR GRATITUDE WAS TINGED WITH SUSPICION...



THE CREW JUMPED.
BUT RENNIE DID NOT
GO WITH THEM...

STAND BY
TO PICK UP
SURVIVORS!

FOUR-FIVE -
AND JOE'S DEAD IN THE
NOSE TURRET. WHERE'S
THE SKIPPER?

RENNIE'S CREW HAD
BEEN RIGHT IN THEIR
SUSPICIONS. THEIR
SKIPPER'S REASON
FOR LETTING THEM
BAIL OUT HAD BEEN
A SELFISH ONE...

NOW I'M ON MY
OWN! AND I RECKON
THE OLD GIRL WILL
STAY AIRBORNE LONG
ENOUGH TO TAKE ME
WHERE I WANT TO GO.



Counter-Stroke

THE BATTERED LANCASTER SPLUTTERINGLY WHEELED IN THE SKY ABOVE THEM...



Chapter 2. THE MAQUISARDS

SIX MINUTES
LATER, A FRENCH
FARMER AND
HIS SON SAW
THE STRICKEN
LANCASTER
LURCHING
INLAND FROM
THE SEA, AND
LOSING HEIGHT
RAPIDLY...

UN AVION
ANGLAIS, PAPA!

OUI, JEAN—
AND IT IS IN
TROUBLE!



THE LANCASTER MADE A
WHEELS-UP LANDING ON A
FLAT PATCH OF GROUND
NEARBY. FORTUNATELY,
THERE WAS NO FIRE...

WE MUST
HELP THE ENGLISH
AVIATORS, JEAN— IF
THERE ARE ANY
LEFT ALIVE!

OUI, PAPA!
THE BOCHE
WILL BE HERE
SOON!



Counter-Stroke

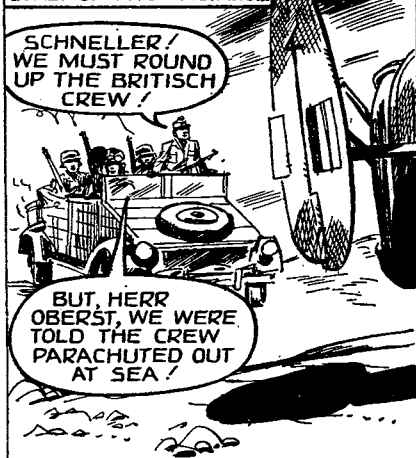
THE FRENCHMEN WERE IN TIME TO SEE A LONE FIGURE RUNNING FROM THE WRECKED AIRCRAFT...



HUGO RENNIE TURNED VICIOUSLY AT BAY AS THE FATHER AND HIS SON CROPT UP ON HIM...



THE GERMANS HAD KEPT THE LANCASTER UNDER OBSERVATION EVER SINCE IT HAD LIMPED OUT OVER THE COAST ON TWO ENGINES...



BUT RENNIE HAD ANTICIPATED THE GERMANS' CURIOSITY—AND TAKEN STEPS TO SATISFY IT.

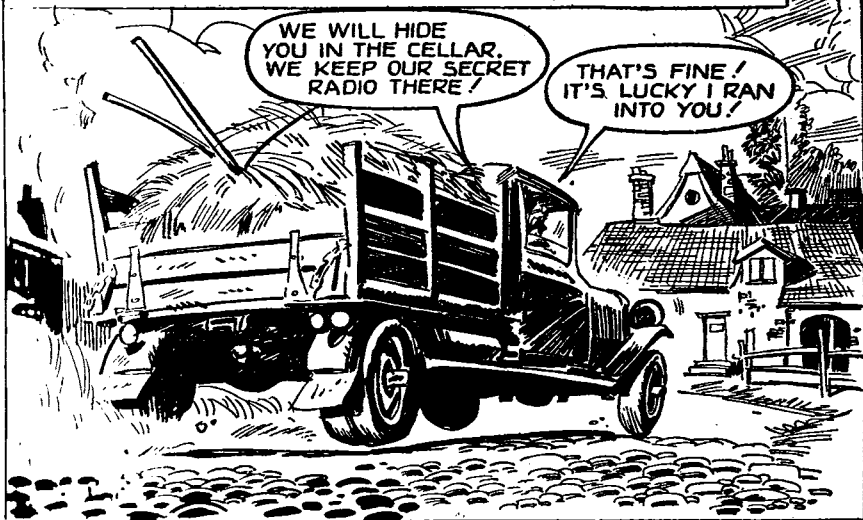
ACH, YOU WERE RIGHT, KURT! HERE IS THE PILOT, DEAD! WE SHALL NEVER KNOW WHY THE POOR FOOL BROUGHT HIS AIRCRAFT BACK HERE, ALONE!

I PUT THE NOSE GUNNER'S DEAD BODY IN THE PILOT'S SEAT—AND JERRY'S FALLEN FOR THE TRICK! NO-ONE KNOWS I'M HERE!

WHEN THE GERMANS HAD GONE, THE TWO FRENCHMEN TOOK RENNIE TO THEIR FARM A FEW MILES AWAY...

WE WILL HIDE YOU IN THE CELLAR. WE KEEP OUR SECRET RADIO THERE!

THAT'S FINE! IT'S LUCKY I RAN INTO YOU!



Counter-Stroke

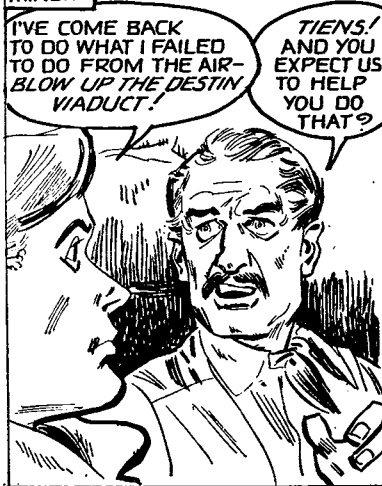
RENNIE LOOKED AROUND THE CELLAR THOUGHTFULLY...



AFTER DARK, A HANDFUL OF VETERAN FRENCH FARMERS GATHERED SECRETLY IN THE CELLAR UNDER GASPARD'S FARMHOUSE...



AS HIS COMRADES IN THE SQUADRON USED TO COMPLAIN, HUGO RENNIE HAD A ONE-TRACK MIND...



THE OLD FRENCHMAN SHOOK HIS HEAD VEHEMENTLY...

WHY NOT, GASPARD? YOU'RE ORGANISED-YOU'VE GOT A TRUCK-AND EXPLOSIVES, PROBABLY.

NON, M'SIEU, C'EST IMPOSSIBLE! WE ARE JUST FARMERS, NOT SOLDIERS! CUTTING TELEGRAPH WIRES, LETTING DOWN TYRES ON BOCHE TRUCKS, THAT IS MORE IN OUR LINE!



ALL RENNIE'S APPEALS FELL ON DEAF EARS, BUT OLD GASPARD'S SON WAS ON THE ENGLISHMAN'S SIDE...

SILENCE, JEAN! WE CANNOT HELP YOU, M'SIEU, I REGRET! WRECKING THE DESTIN VIADUCT IS TOO BIG A JOB FOR SUCH HUMBLE SABOTEURS AS US!

MAIS, PAPA—



Counter-Stroke

NEXT DAY, WHEN THE BOY BROUGHT FOOD TO THE CELLAR, RENNIE TRIED HIS WILES ON HIM...

YOU'VE GOT YOUR EYE ON THESE FLYING BOOTS, HAVEN'T YOU, JEAN? IF YOU PERSUADE YOUR FATHER TO HELP ME—THEY'RE YOURS.

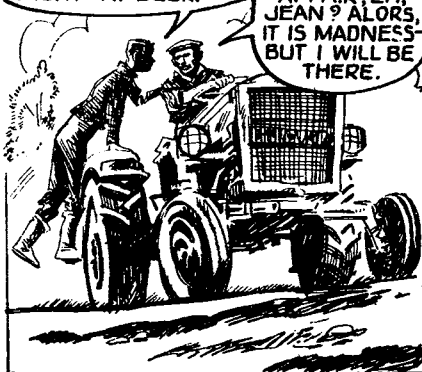


I AM A PATRIOT, M'SIEU—I WILL PERSUADE HIM FOR FRANCE! MAIS CERTAINEMENT—THEY ARE FINE BOOTS!

IT TOOK JEAN SEVEN DAYS TO WEAR HIS FATHER DOWN, BUT EVENTUALLY THE YOUNG FRENCHMAN GOT RENNIE'S FLYING BOOTS...

I HAVE A MESSAGE FROM FATHER, HENRI. WE SHALL NEED THE GELIGNITE TOMORROW NIGHT—AT DUSK.

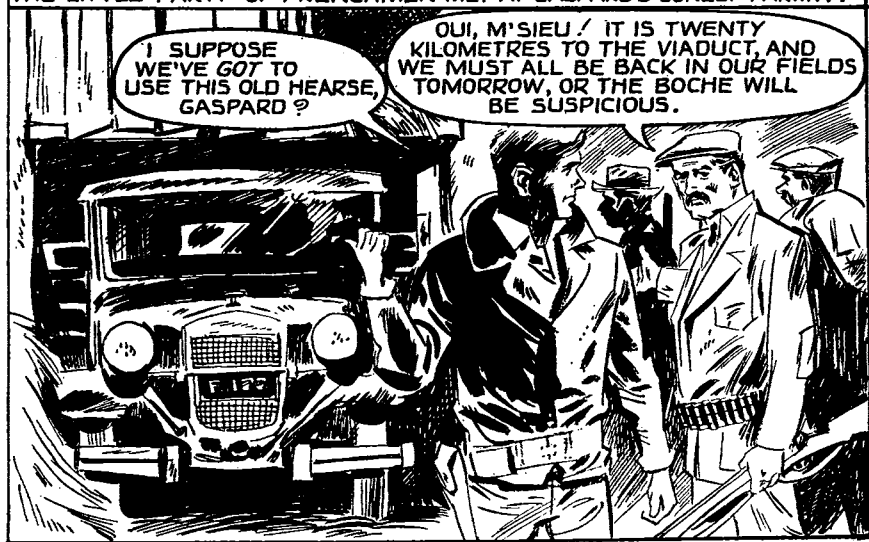
SO YOU FINALLY TALKED HIM INTO THIS AFFAIR, EH, JEAN? ALORS, IT IS MADNESS—BUT I WILL BE THERE.



THE LITTLE PARTY OF FRENCHMEN MET AT GASPARD'S LONELY FARM...

I SUPPOSE WE'VE GOT TO USE THIS OLD HEARSE, GASPARD?

OUI, M'SIEU! IT IS TWENTY KILOMETRES TO THE VIADUCT, AND WE MUST ALL BE BACK IN OUR FIELDS TOMORROW, OR THE BOCHE WILL BE SUSPICIOUS.



RENNIE WAS TAKEN ABACK BY GASPARD'S QUESTION AS THE TRUCK LUMBERED OFF INTO THE DARKNESS, BUT HE ANSWERED IT GLIBLY...

TELL ME ONE THING, M'SIEU - YOU ARE SO HUNGRY TO DESTROY THE VIADUCT - WHY IS THIS ?

BECAUSE I - THAT IS - WELL, I'M FIGHTING FOR MY COUNTRY JUST LIKE YOU ARE. I WANT TO HIT THE JERRIES WHERE IT HURTS !



JUST TWELVE KILOMETRES FROM THE VIADUCT, THE ANCIENT ENGINE OF THE FARM TRUCK COUGHED AND DIED...

THENS ! THE TRUCK HAS BROKEN DOWN, PAPA !

CURSE IT ! WE'LL HAVE TO MAKE FOR THE VIADUCT ON FOOT, THEN !



I DO NOT LIKE THIS AT ALL, M'SIEU. BUT VERY WELL.

THINGS WERE ALREADY GOING WRONG, AS THE OLD FRENCHMAN HAD KNOWN THEY WOULD. HE GAVE JEAN HIS ORDERS IN A HEAVY VOICE...

BUT WHY SHOULD IT BE ME WHO STAYS TO MEND THE ENGINE, PAPA?

BECAUSE I SMELL TROUBLE, JEAN, BAD TROUBLE—AND I DO NOT WISH TO THROW AWAY YOUR LIFE ON THIS MADNESS!

HURRY IT UP, GASPARD!

IT TOOK THE LITTLE PARTY MOST OF THE NIGHT TO STRUGGLE NINE KILOMETRES ACROSS THE ROUGH COUNTRY SOUTH OF THE DESTIN VIADUCT...

HECK, NOT ANOTHER STOP! WHAT'S HOLDING YOU UP NOW?

I HAVE TOLD YOU BEFORE, M'SIEU, WE ARE NOT SOLDIERS... AND SOME OF US ARE OLD.

LISTEN, GASPARD, AN AEROPLANE!

SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE FIRST STREAK OF DAYLIGHT ALONG THE HORIZON, A GERMAN SPOTTER AIRCRAFT WAS CRUISING METHODICALLY OVER THE APPROACHES TO THE VIADUCT...

IT IS THE BOCHE DAWN PATROL! WE CANNOT GO ON, M'SIEU! WE WOULD NEVER REACH THE VIADUCT WITHOUT BEING SEEN!

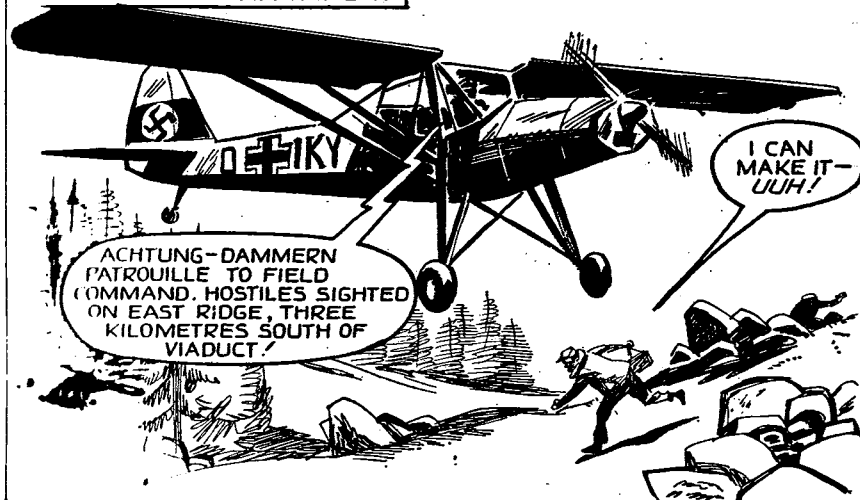
KEEP DOWN THEN, ALL OF YOU! JERRY MAY FLY ON OVER SOON!



TIMING WITH FRUSTRATION, RENNIE STUCK IT FOR TWENTY MINUTES. BUT HE WAS NOT A PATIENT MAN...



THE PLANE HAD WHEELED AWAY MOMENTARILY, BUT AS RENNIE HARTED ACROSS THE OPEN GROUND, IT SWOOPED LOW OVERHEAD WITH ITS RADIO CHATTERING...



Counter-Stroke

THE GERMANS HAD MOBILE PATROLS ON CONSTANT WATCH IN THE VALLEY NORTH AND SOUTH OF THE VIADUCT. ALERTED BY THE SPOTTER AIRCRAFT, THEY WENT INTO ACTION...



INADEQUATELY ARMED, UNTRAINED, AND NO LONGER YOUNG, THE LITTLE PARTY OF FRENCHMEN WERE SOON CUT OFF AND THREATENED WITH ANNIHILATION...



THE GERMANS WERE CLOSING IN FOR THE LAST KILLING RUSH, WHEN...

FORWARD, KAMERADEN! FINISH OFF THE SCHWEIN!

ACHTUNG, HERR LEUTNANT! A TRUCK!



IT WAS GASPARD'S OLD TRUCK WITH YOUNG JEAN AT THE WHEEL. HE HAD JUST MANAGED TO REPAIR IT WHEN HE HEARD THE SOUND OF FIRING FROM THE NORTH...

VIII
MIL AMIS!
I COME!

IT IS JEAN!
STAY OUT OF THIS,
YOU YOUNG FOOL!

NO, GASPARD! COME
ON! HE'S GIVING US A
CHANCE TO ESCAPE!



Counter-Stroke

RENNIE, GASPARD AND TWO OTHER SURVIVORS RAN FOR THE TRUCK. AT THAT MOMENT, THE STACCATO CRACKLE OF A SCHMEISSER CUT THE AIR...



RENNIE GRABBED THE WHEEL AND GUNNED THE ENGINE. HE PAID NO ATTENTION TO THE DYING JEAN OR HIS HEARTBROKEN FATHER IN THE CAB BESIDE HIM.



THE TRUCK SLEWED
AROUND AND SLAMMED
THROUGH THE CORDON
OF GERMAN SOLDIERS.
WINNIE'S VOICE WAS
TRIUMPHANT.

ACHTUNG! STOP
THE SCHWEIN-
UUUH!

AAAAGH!

MADE IT! SO I'M NOT
FINISHED WITH THAT
VIADUCT YET!



THE TERRIBLE EYES WHICH OLD GASPARD TURNED ON HIM AS THE TRUCK
BROKE OUT OF THE GERMAN TRAP, BURNED ACCUSINGLY EVEN THROUGH
WINNIE'S TOUGH SKIN.

DON'T LOOK AT ME
LIKE THAT, GASPARD. SO
IF AN IS DEAD-BUT HE
DIED FOR FRANCE!

NON, M'SIEU-
HE DIED FOR YOU!
AND YOU DO NOT
FIGHT FOR YOUR
COUNTRY-YOU FIGHT
ONLY FOR YOUR-
SELF!



Chapter 3. *COMMANDO TARGET*

TWELVE NIGHTS AFTER HUGO RENNIE'S SECOND ATTEMPT TO WRECK THE VIADUCT, A BRITISH SUBMARINE SURFACED OFF THE COAST OF SOUTHERN FRANCE. THE ALLIED INVASION PLAN WAS NEARING ITS CLIMAX...

ALL CANOES STREAMED, SKIPPER - COMMANDO FORCE READY TO GO !

OKAY, MAJOR ? GOOD LUCK, THEN !



THE COMMANDO FORCE WAS BEING SENT IN TWELVE HOURS AHEAD OF THE MAJOR LANDING. ITS PURPOSE WAS TO DISRUPT THE GERMAN REAR COMMUNICATIONS.

HIDE THE CANOES - SINK THEM, IF NECESSARY, WE SHAN'T BE NEEDING THEM AGAIN.

NO, SIR - AS LONG AS THEY STICK TO PRESENT PLANS AND LAND THE MAIN INVASION FORCE TOMORROW.



IN FACT, THE
COMMANDOS'
PRIMARY TARGET
WAS THE DESTIN
VIADUCT. THE R.A.F.
RAID HAVING FAILED,
THE BRITISH HIGH
COMMAND WAS
MAKING A FURTHER
ATTEMPT TO WRECK
THAT VITAL ROAD
LINK...

HURRY, MEN— I WANT TO BE
WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE OF THE
VIADUCT THREE HOURS BEFORE DAWN.
WE'VE GOT FIFTEEN MILES TO GO.



AFTER FIVE HOURS OF FAST TREKKING ACROSS THE SLEEPING COUNTRYSIDE...

THERE'S THE VIADUCT.
NOW WE NEED TO FIND A
BASE WHERE WE CAN
HIDE OUT AFTER WE'VE
WRECKED IT!

THERE'S A CAVE
AHEAD, SIR— WILL
THAT DO ?



Counter-Stroke

AS THE MAJOR AND HIS MEN ENTERED THE CAVE, A SHADOWY FIGURE SLID AWAY FROM THE PROBING BEAMS OF THEIR FLASHLIGHTS...



TWO OF THE COMMANDOS
CLOSED ON THE UNKNOWN
MAN...



THE MAN THEY HAD GRABBED WAS HUGO RENNIE...

AAH—STOP—I'M ENGLISH! A RAF PILOT!

COR, I'M GLAD YOU SAID SO, TOSH—BEFORE IT WAS TOO LATE!

RENNIE WAS HAGGARD AND FILTHY AFTER MORE THAN A WEEK OF HIDING IN THE CAVE. HIS EYES HAD A FEVERISH GLITTER...

NAME—RANK—REASON FOR BEING HERE? SPEAK UP, MAN!

RENNIE, FLIGHT-LIEUTENANT. I CRASH-LANDED AFTER THE SQUADRON TRIED TO BOMB THE VIADUCT TWO WEEKS AGO...

HE HAD PARTED COMPANY WITH THE SHATTERED GASPARD DIRECTLY THEY HAD ESCAPED FROM THE GERMANS...

I LINKED UP WITH SOME FRENCH TYPES AND TRIED TO BLOW THE VIADUCT FROM THE GROUND—BUT THE FROGS WERE A DEAD LOSS!

WELL, YOU CAN RELAX NOW, RENNIE! ME AND MY MEN HAVE COME TO BLOW UP THE DESTIN VIADUCT!

Counter-Stroke



THE MAJOR SHRUGGED OFF RENNIE'S CLUTCHING HAND, FROWNING AT HIM CURIOUSLY...

BUT YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME! I'VE GOT A RIGHT TO GO WITH YOU- TO WRECK THAT VIADUCT. I'VE GOT MORE RIGHT THAN YOU HAVE.

DON'T TALK CRAZY, RENNIE! BLOWING THE VIADUCT IS A JOB OF WORK - OUR JOB OF WORK - NOT YOURS!



THE COMMANDOS SETTLED DOWN FOR A BRIEF REST, WATCHED BY RENNIE'S GLITTERING EYES...



WHEN THE CAVE WAS QUIET, RENNIE MOVED LIKE A SHADOW TO THE PACK THE CORPORAL HAD PUT DOWN.

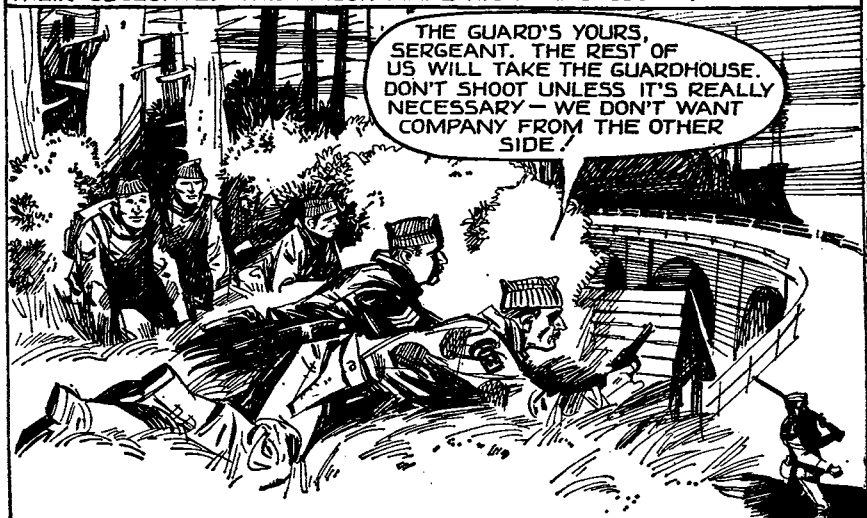


AN HOUR LATER, THE MAJOR ROUSED HIS MEN. RENNIE STOOD IN THE MOUTH OF THE CAVE TO WATCH THEM GO, A HARSH SMILE ON HIS FACE...



Counter-Stroke

IN THE HALF-LIGHT BEFORE DAWN, THE COMMANDO FORCE REACHED THEIR OBJECTIVE. THE MAJOR MADE HIS PLANS COOLLY...



THE GERMAN SENTRY WAS JOYLY HUMMING TO HIMSELF WHEN A ROCK-HARD HAND FELLEED HIM LIKE AN AXE...



THE SIX GERMANS IN THE GUARDHOUSE WERE TAKEN COMPLETELY BY SURPRISE...

ACH—
WAS IST?

GRAB 'EM,
MEN!



BUT IT WAS THE CUSTOM FOR THE GERMAN GUARDS AT EITHER END OF THE VIADUCT TO CHECK WITH EACH OTHER AT REGULAR INTERVALS.

AAAAGH!



THE VOICE IN THE HEADPHONE WAS UNANSWERED. UNAWARE THAT THE SUSPICIONS OF THE GERMANS ACROSS THE VALLEY HAD BEEN AROUSED, THE MAJOR LED HIS MEN ON TO THE VIADUCT...

WE'LL FIX THE CHARGE
A COUPLE OF HUNDRED YARDS
OUT! BRING THE EXPLOSIVES
UP, CORPORAL!

COMING, SIR!



Counter-Stroke

ON THE WESTERN SIDE OF THE VIADUCT, THE GUARD WAS DETACHING A SECTION TO INVESTIGATE...

SERGEANT / FIND OUT
WHAT IS WRONG WITH THOSE
DUMMKOPFS IN THE GUARD-
HOUSE THERE !

JAWOHL, HERR
HAUPTMAN.



THE CORPORAL CARRYING THE
EXPLOSIVES UNDOED THE STRAPS,
PUT HIS HAND
INSIDE THE PACK
AND STOPPED
DEAD...

COME ON, CORPORAL,
LET'S HAVE YOU ! WHERE
ARE THOSE CHARGES AND
DETONATORS ?

JUST A
MOMENT, SIR-
I DON'T - OH
NO !



THE COMMANDOS HAD REACHED THEIR OBJECTIVE, BUT NOW HUGO RENNIE'S SELFISH AMBITION HAD CHEATED THEM...

WHAT THE DEVIL?

ROCKS, SIR! THE EXPLOSIVES AND DETONATORS—SOMEONE'S TAKEN THEM!



AT THAT MOMENT, RENNIE HIMSELF APPEARED BEHIND THE THUNDERSTRUCK COMMANDOS...

LOOK, SIR—IT'S THAT R.A.F. PILOT!

IT ISN'T POSSIBLE—HE COULDN'T HAVE—



MAJOR, BEHIND US—JERRIES!

RENNIE HELD THE EXPLOSIVES IN HIS ARMS. HE WAS GRINNING...

DON'T WORRY, MAJOR—I'VE GOT YOUR EXPLOSIVES! I JUST WANTED TO MAKE SURE YOU DIDN'T BLOW UP MY VIADUCT BEFORE I ARRIVED!

YOU MUST BE MAD, RENNIE—MAD!

WE'LL TRY TO HOLD OFF THE JERRIES WHILE YOU FIX THE CHARGES, MAJOR.



Counter-Stroke

AT THAT MOMENT, THE APPROACHING GERMANS IDENTIFIED THE ARMED MEN ON THE VIADUCT AHEAD OF THEM. THEY REACTED QUICKLY...

TEUFEL!
BRITISCH
KOMMANDOS!
FIRE THE RED
FLARE, HEINE!
DEPLOY, MEN!

SCHNELL!
SCHNELL!



THE MAJOR CLOSED ON RENNIE, HIS VOICE CRISP AND COMMANDING...

GIVE ME THOSE CHARGES, RENNIE! WE'VE GOT TO BLOW THE VIADUCT AT ONCE, OR JERRY WILL BRING REINFORCEMENTS ACROSS!

OH NO, MAJOR!
I'M GOING TO WRECK
THIS VIADUCT, AND
NO-ONE ELSE...



A WEEK OF LONELINESS AND DANGER HAD SHARPENED RENNIE'S AMBITION TO WRECK THE VIADUCT TO THE POINT OF INSANITY...

MY OATH,
YOU'RE RAVING,
RENNIE!

THIS IS MY
VIADUCT—MINE, DO
YOU HEAR? IT'S
CROSSED ME THREE
TIMES—BUT I'LL GET
EVEN WITH
IT!



THE WARNING FLARE BROUGHT TRUCKLOADS OF GERMANS TO THE VIADUCT...

OH HECK, MAJOR,
MORE JERRIES
TURNING UP!

THAT'S IT, RENNIE! NO-ONE'S
GOING TO WRECK THE BRIDGE NOW,
NOT ME OR YOU! IF I'D HAD THOSE
CHARGES IN THE FIRST PLACE THERE
MIGHT HAVE BEEN TIME - BUT
NOT NOW!

FOR ONE HORRIFIED MOMENT,
RENNIE'S FOGGED MIND
CLEARED AND HE REALISED
THAT HIS ACTION HAD FATALLY
BETRAYED THE COMMANDOS.

OH MY
OATH - WHAT HAVE
I DONE?

Counter-Stroke

THE COMMANDOS BEGAN TO BACK OFF THE VIADUCT AS A MURDEROUS FIRE PUNCHED HOLES IN THEIR RANKS...



AS THE MAJOR GRAPPLED WITH RENNIE, THE HANDFUL OF DETONATORS SLIPPED FROM HIS UPFLUNG FINGERS...



A GERMAN BULLET RIPPED INTO THE BUNCH OF DETONATORS IN MID-AIR. THE EXPLOSION WAS SHARP AND VIOLENT, AND THE MAJOR TOOK THE BRUNT OF IT...



THE BLAST FLUNG THE MAJOR AND RENNIE OVER THE GUARD RAIL AT THE END OF THE VIADUCT...



Counter-Stroke

THIRTY MINUTES LATER, WHEN THE SHARP FIGHT WAS OVER, TWO GERMANS NOTICED THE DEAD BODY OF THE BRITISH COMMANDO MAJOR LYING ON THE ROCKS BELOW...

THE SURVIVORS OF THE BRITISH KOMMANDO FORCE ARE BEING HUNTED TO THE EAST, HERR HAUPTMANN! DO YOU WISH THE BODY OF THEIR MAJOR TO BE PICKED UP?

NEIN, WE HAVE NO TIME FOR THE HONOURS OF WAR. THE BRITISH HAVE LANDED IN FORCE ON THE COAST AND WE MUST GET THESE CONVOYS THROUGH!

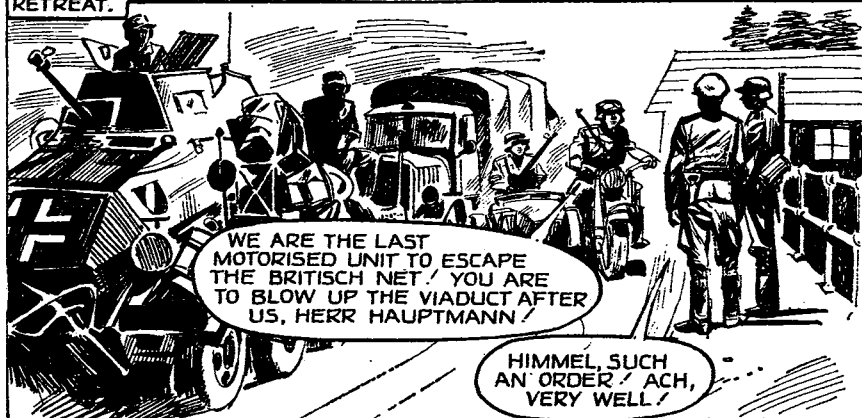


BUT UNKNOWN TO THE GERMANS, A SECOND ENGLISHMAN WAS LYING Huddled in the rocks below the viaduct, hidden by the dead major's body...



Chapter 4. THE ATONEMENT

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS PASSED. THE BRITISH LANDING ON THE COAST ACHIEVED UNEXPECTEDLY QUICK RESULTS, TAKING THE GERMANS COMPLETELY BY SURPRISE AND DRIVING THEM INLAND IN HEADLONG RETREAT.



THE IRONY OF WAR HAD TURNED THE SITUATION UPSIDE DOWN...

BUT THIS IS MADNESS,
HERR HAUPTMANN—FOR MONTHS
WE DEFEND THE VIADUCT AND THE
BRITISH TRY TO WRECK IT!

MY DEAR,
HEINRICH—HOW ELSE
CAN WE STOP THE
BRITISH? GET THE
ENGINEERS TO
WORK!



Counter-Stroke

NOT FAR TO THE EAST, THE BRITISH INFANTRY WERE SLOGGING DESPERATELY FORWARD TO REACH THE DESTIN VIADUCT IN TIME...

ONE MORE RIDGE, AND WE'LL BE ABLE TO GRAB THE VIADUCT INTACT!

IF THE JERRIES DON'T BLOW IT UP FIRST!



BUT THE GERMANS HAD MACHINE GUNS MOUNTED THERE...

IT'LL TAKE US AN HOUR TO CAPTURE THIS RIDGE, CAPTAIN, WITH THOSE SPANDAUS ENFILADING THE SLOPE!



I'M AFRAID SO, SERGEANT! LOOKS LIKE JERRY WILL WRECK THE DESTIN VIADUCT AND HOLD UP OUR ADVANCE FOR WEEKS!

THROUGH ALL THOSE TWENTY-FOUR HOURS OF SOMERSAULTING FORTUNES OF WAR, THE UNCONSCIOUS HUGO RENNIE HAD LAIN HIDDEN ON THE SLOPE BELOW THE VIADUCT. AT LAST, HE STIRRED ...

WIRE UP THE CHARGES, MEN! SCHNELL!

WE SHALL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME TO WRECK THE VIADUCT BEFORE THE BRITISH BREAK THROUGH!



FIGHTING FOR CONSCIOUSNESS, RENNIE LAY STILL FOR A MINUTE OR TWO, TRYING TO REMEMBER WHAT HAD HAPPENED...



HIS MIND
WANDERED
BACK OVER
THE YEARS...

I'VE JUST DRIVEN THE
CAR OVER THE VIADUCT,
HAVEN'T I? I'VE FALLEN
ASLEEP OVER THE WHEEL -
AND PAT'S DEAD - AND IT'S
ME WHO'S KILLED
HIM!



THE PAST SWAM BEFORE HIS ACHING EYES...



FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS LIFE, HE SAW HIS GUILT IN ALL ITS UGLINESS...

NO, THAT'S PAST, TOO! I'M IN THE TRUCK WITH OLD GASPARD AND THAT POOR KID OF HIS, JEAN. IT WAS I WHO GOT JEAN KILLED WITH MY ROTTEN SELFISHNESS.



THEN HE SAW THE DEAD BODY OF THE MAJOR, SPRAWLED BESIDE HIM, AND RECOILED WITH A SHOCK OF HORROR...



NO-OH HECK, NO-- EVEN THAT STILL ISN'T ALL! I REMEMBER NOW I STOLE THE EXPLOSIVES FROM THOSE COMMANDOS. THEY WERE SWAMPED BY THE JERRIES BECAUSE OF ME-- AND THE MAJOR DIED SAVING MY LIFE.



CRAWLING TO HIS FEET, HE HEARD VOICES ON ONE OF THE PILES OF THE VIADUCT FIFTY YARDS AWAY. THEY WERE GERMAN VOICES.



SHOCK AND EXHAUSTION HAD JARRED HUGO RENNIE'S MIND OUT OF ITS GROOVE. HE SAW THE SITUATION WITH A MAD, TWISTED, BUT BLINDLY CLEAR LOGIC...



Counter-Stroke

HE CLAMBERED PAINFULLY UP TO THE STONEMWORK OF THE VIADUCT AND BEGAN TO CRAWL TOWARDS THE GERMAN ENGINEERS...



THE FIRST GERMAN WAS TOO SLOW IN HIS REACTIONS. RENNIE'S FOOT SWEEPED HIM VICIOUSLY FROM HIS HAND-HOLD...



THE BLOW MISSED RENNIE BY A HAIRSBREADTH AND THE GERMAN OVERBALANCED WITH A CRY OF TERROR...



AN ARMED GUARD HAD SEEN THE COMMOTION AND HURRIED TO DEAL WITH THE LONE ENGLISHMAN. HE WAS NOT QUICK ENOUGH...

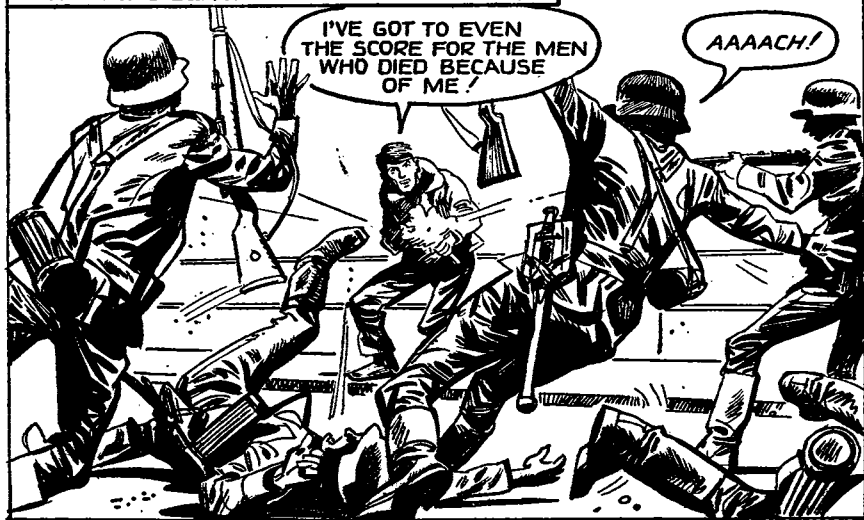


THERE WAS THE STRENGTH OF MADNESS IN RENNIE'S ARMS AT THAT MOMENT...

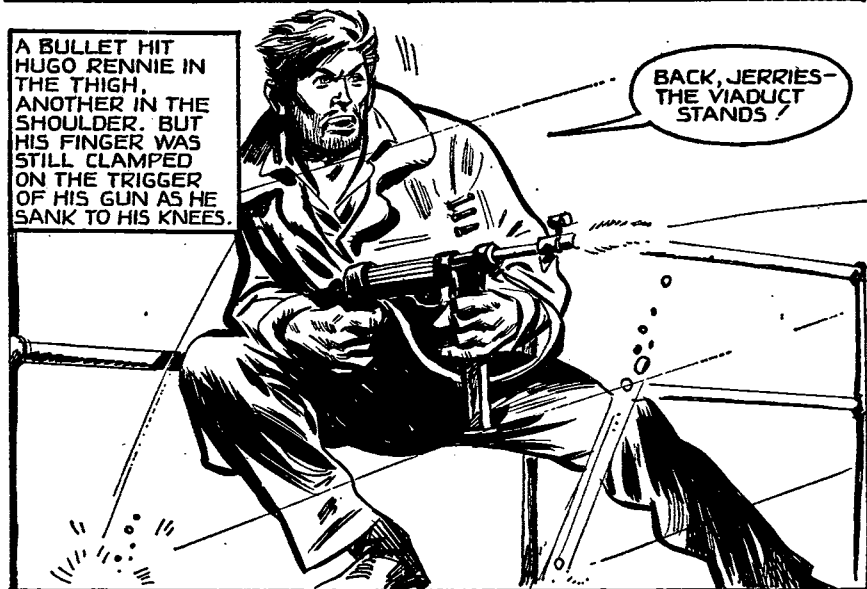


Counter-Stroke

AS THE GERMAN REARGUARD RUSHED FORWARD, RENNIE CUT LOOSE WITH A LONG BLAST FROM THE SCHMEISSER...



A BULLET HIT HUGO RENNIE IN THE THIGH, ANOTHER IN THE SHOULDER. BUT HIS FINGER WAS STILL CLAMPED ON THE TRIGGER OF HIS GUN AS HE SANK TO HIS KNEES.



FIVE MINUTES LATER, THE ADVANCED ELEMENTS OF THE BRITISH INVASION FORCE REACHED THE DESTIN VIADUCT...



THE VIADUCT WAS LITTERED WITH DEAD GERMANS, THE NEAREST OF THEM ONLY A FOOT OR TWO FROM THE LONE ENGLISHMAN WHO HAD HELD THEM AT BAY...



Counter-Stroke



AND TO THIS DAY, NO-ONE KNOWS THE FULL, STRANGE STORY BEHIND THE PLAQUE MOUNTED ON THE DESTIN VIADUCT.



Cheek of the Devil

THERE WERE THIRTY MEN IN THE COASTAL A.A. BATTERY, WITH THREE GUNS BETWEEN THEM. FOR SIX WEEKS THEY HAD BEEN WITHOUT AN OFFICER AND WITH THE AUTUMN WEATHER AT ITS BEST THEY WERE ENJOYING LIFE TO THE FULL ...



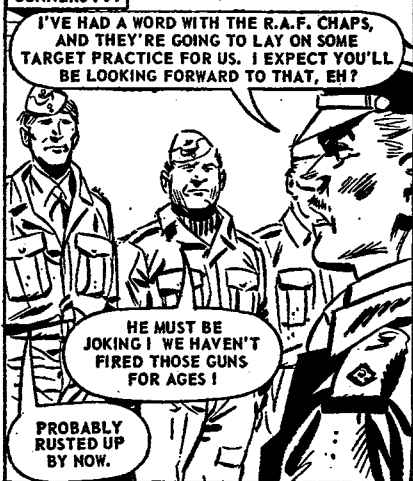
BUT THE MEN'S PEACE WAS NOT TO LAST A DAY LONGER. THE FOLLOWING MORNING A NEW OFFICER ARRIVED. FRESH FROM O.C.T.U., SECOND LIEUTENANT HERBERT ALBERRY WAS PROUD TO HAVE HIS OWN COMMAND - UNTIL HE SAW IT ...



LIEUTENANT ALBERRY BEGAN THE WAY HE MEANT TO GO ON. FOR THE GUNNERS THE EASY LIFE WAS OVER ...



ONCE HE HAD MADE THE SITE MORE LIKE A MILITARY UNIT, HERBERT TURNED HIS ATTENTION TO THE MEN'S EFFICIENCY AS GUNNERS ...



THAT AFTERNOON A LONE TIGER MOTH FLEW ALONG THE COAST HALF A MILE AWAY. BEHIND IT BILLOWED A LONG TARGET WIND SOCK. AFTER THE FIRST RUN, THE PILOT WAS BEGINNING TO DOUBT THE WISDOM OF THE EXERCISE . . .

IF YOU ASK ME THEY'LL END UP SHOOTING US DOWN, SERGEANT!

DON'T TEMPT PROVIDENCE, SIR. JUST KEEP YOUR FINGERS CROSSED.

FOR HALF AN HOUR THE GUNNERS LABOURED, BUT FOR ALL THEIR EFFORT THEY HAD PRECIOUS LITTLE TO SHOW FOR IT . . .

CEASE FIRE! WELL THAT WAS A PRETTY POOR SHOW, CHAPS. ONLY ONE HIT FROM THE LOT OF YOU. I CAN SEE I'VE A LOT TO DO!

BEST THING HE COULD DO WOULD BE TO GO BACK WHERE HE CAME FROM!

LIEUTENANT ALBERRY TRIED HARD TO LAY ON ANOTHER PRACTICE SHOOT, BUT THE WORD HAD GOT ROUND THE LOCAL R.A.F. STATIONS. THEN A WEEK LATER, CAME THE MOMENT HE HAD BEEN WAITING FOR . . .

RAID
ALERT! ACTION
STATIONS!

FOR SOME OF THE MEN IT WAS THEIR FIRST ALERT. EVEN THEY FOUND THEMSELVES CAUGHT UP IN THE EXCITEMENT.

THERE THEY ARE! COMING STRAIGHT IN!

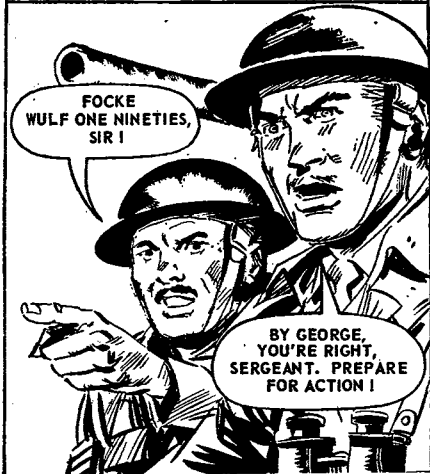


THE TWO AIRCRAFT WERE SKIMMING THE WATER IN PERFECT FORMATION AND FLYING STRAIGHT DOWN THE GUN BARRELS...

THE THREE 3.7 INCH A.A. GUNS BARKED OUT THEIR CHALLENGE. THE SMELL OF CORDITE DRIFTED OVER THE BATTERY AS THE RELUCTANT GUNNERS FED SHELLS INTO THE BREECHES...

FOCKE WOLF ONE NINETIES, SIR!

BY GEORGE, YOU'RE RIGHT, SERGEANT. PREPARE FOR ACTION!



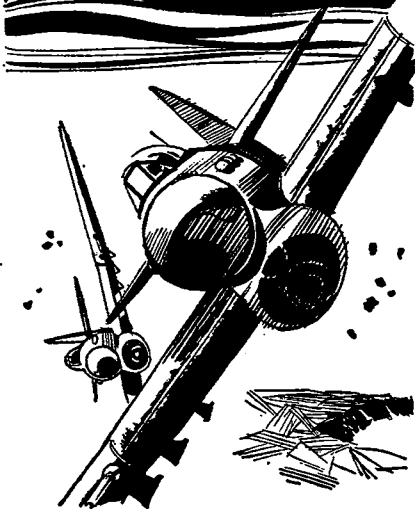
OUT OVER THE CHANNEL, THE TWO PILOTS SAW THE SHELLS BURSTING AHEAD OF THEM WITH WIDE-EYED AMAZEMENT . . .



THE AIRCRAFT WERE HAWKER TEMPESTS. THEY HAD BEEN ON A RAID OVER NORTHERN FRANCE. THE PILOTS HAD THOUGHT THEY HAD LEFT THE FLAK BEHIND THEM . . .



THE TWO AIRCRAFT CLIMBED STEEPLY AWAY FROM THE BURSTING FLAK . . .



THE TWO MEN WERE LUCKY. ALMOST ANY OTHER TEAM OF GUNNERS ON THE SOUTH COAST WOULD HAVE BLOWN THEM OUT OF THE SKY ...



THEN THEY WERE OVER THE CLIFFS AND SPEEDING INLAND. LIEUTENANT ALBERRY GAVE THE ORDER TO CEASE FIRE ...



BADLY SHAKEN BY THEIR NARROW ESCAPE, THE R.A.F. PILOTS LANDED BACK AT BASE. THEY IMMEDIATELY REPORTED TO THEIR COMMANDING OFFICER ...



IT TOOK THE WING COMMANDER HALF AN HOUR TO FIND OUT WHERE THE BATTERY WAS LOCATED.



LIEUTENANT ALBERRY HAD VERY LITTLE TO SAY FOR HIMSELF. IT WAS THE BIGGEST ROCKET HE HAD RECEIVED IN HIS SHORT LIFE.

IT WAS SHEER GOOD LUCK THAT BOTH MY CHAPS WEREN'T KILLED! IF I HAD MY WAY YOU'D BE COURT-MARTIALED. WELL WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO SAY?



WELL, DO YOU THINK YOU COULD ASK YOUR CHAPPIES, VERY TACTFULLY OF COURSE, DID WE GET ANYWHERE NEAR THEM...?



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NOTABLE EVENTS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

THE CRUISE OF THE *SCHEER*

The German Navy began the war in a position of marked inferiority to Britain's Royal Navy — in terms of numbers, if not quality of ships. Strategically, therefore, German choices were limited: fighting it out in line of battle was impossible; the only option was commerce war, to be waged against Britain's lifeline — the sea lanes. This meant attacks on convoys, and for this purpose at least the German Navy had some ideal vessels.

In the mid-1930s the Reich had, against the various Treaties of the day, laid down a revolutionary class of three *panzerschiffen* or 'pocket battleships': the *Admiral Graf Spee*, the *Deutschland* (later renamed *Lützow*), and the *Scheer*, named after the commanding German admiral at the World War 1 Battle of Jutland. Of the three 'super-cruisers', the *Scheer* was to be far the most successful.

Armed, like her sister ships, with six 11" guns in two triple turrets and heavy secondary armament, equipped with gunnery radar, and powered by advanced long-range diesels, *Scheer* had been designed from the outset as a raider. In early November 1940 she broke out into the Atlantic through the Denmark Strait. Three days later she sighted her first convoy.

Though no 'real' warship protected the convoy, there was an escort: the armed merchant cruiser *Jervis Bay*, commanded by Captain E.S.F. Fegen. Heroically the underarmed *Jervis Bay* took on the German raider — and was shot to pieces for her pains, Fegen winning a posthumous VC for his gallantry. But he had bought time for the vulnerable convoy; only five more ships were sunk outright before darkness fell and saved the remainder. Nevertheless *Scheer* had made a good start to her first war cruise.

From that gory beginning the raider, operated by her captain Theodor Krancke with great skill, went on to perform the most successful raiding cruise of any World War 2 German warship — a total of 161 days at sea. Supplied at secret rendezvous by German merchantmen sailing under false colours, she even reached — and operated in — the Indian Ocean.

On the whole, her massive guns actually saved lives: ships often surrendered immediately when confronted by her formidable armament. She had several lucky escapes — once when two British cruisers were reported (by a nervous British merchantman) by radio as *German* raiders — enabling Krancke to alter course just in time to avoid them. Krancke was awarded the Knight's Cross — the medal was manufactured by the ship's machine shop and presented to *Scheer*'s captain in a formal quarterdeck ceremony — at which Krancke announced that the *panzerschiff* was homeward bound. In March 1941 *Scheer* returned to Germany via the Denmark Strait, by far the most successful of the famous German 'pocket battleships', and a major thorn in the flesh of the hard-pressed Royal Navy. The ship survived until the very end of the war, being sunk by bombers in April 1945 while docked at Kiel.